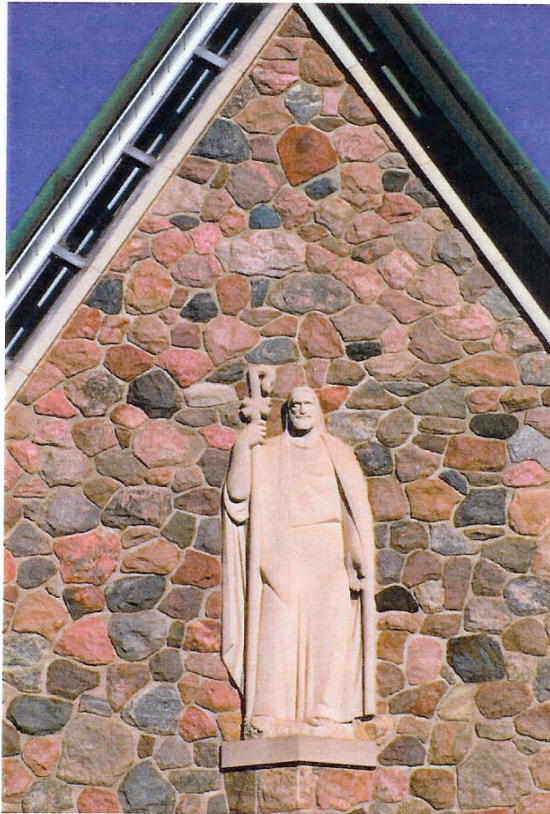


**MEDITATIONS FROM  
ORIOLE – YORK MILLS  
UNITED CHURCH**



**“God’s First Task for Humanity:  
Take Care of Planet Earth”**

**by Reverend Chris T. Miller**

This is one in a series of selected sermons and speeches given at Oriole – York Mills United Church. It is offered as a public service in the spirit of sharing and strengthening our Christian faith. We hope readers benefit from these meditations and the insights they provide.

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**“God’s First Task for Humanity:  
Take Care of Planet Earth”  
Psalm 8, Romans 8:18-25,  
John 1:1-4, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:2**

*Charlotte’s Web* is a delightful children’s story by E. B. White. You may have seen the movie version in the past year or two. It is the story of a pig named Wilbur. Wilbur becomes scared when he realizes that he is eventually going to end up on the dinner table. So he hatches a plan with Charlotte, a spider that lives in Wilbur’s barn, to ensure that this will never happen. Here is what goes on when Wilbur and Charlotte meet for the first time:

"I think now is the time for me to say 'Salutations,'" says Charlotte.

"What?" asks Wilbur.

"Salutations."

"Oh," says Wilbur, "I'll let you."

"No," Charlotte chuckles. "Salutations is just a funny way of saying 'Hello.'"

"Oh! Hello! Hey — " Wilbur exclaims, "you know my name. What's yours?"

"My name is Charlotte — Charlotte *eg vaticus*."

"Charlotte. Great name!" says Wilbur.

"Thank you," replies Charlotte, "I've always thought so."

"Hey, since you said 'salu...', you know — that word — does that mean we're friends?" Wilbur asks.

"Hmmm. I suppose it does," answers Charlotte.

"Yeah! Woohoo!" Wilbur shouts, as he dances around the barn.

"Golly," says Gussy the goose, "go see what's going on over there."

"Hey, kid," says Golly the goose, "what's going on over here?"

"Oh, sorry," answers Wilbur, "I just made a new friend. That's all."

"The spider? Oh yeah. Good choice," Golly says sarcastically.

Templeton the rat joins the conversation: "Yeah, perfect. You've picked someone even more despised than me!"

"Why would anyone despise Charlotte?" Wilbur asks. "She made that amazing web, and she keeps bugs out of the barn."

"Look at her," Templeton answers, "don't you think she's a little — oh, what's the word?"

"I think she's beautiful," says Wilbur.

Samuel the sheep comments: **"I beg your pardon, are we even seeing the same ruddy creature?"**

**"I guess not," answers Wilbur.**

What do you see when you look at the Earth – at the whole of creation? Something that is big enough to take our abuse, our exploitation and our pollution? Or is Earth and everything on it something God has given to us to be tended carefully, wisely and responsibly?



Source: NASA Apollo 17 Moon Mission

In her epic poem *Aurora Leigh*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning penned:

Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God;  
But only he who sees takes off his shoes,  
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.

**I beg your pardon, are we even seeing the same ruddy creature? I guess not.**

If you stay for the first of Oriole-York Mills' Lunch 'n Learn series today (and I sincerely hope you do), you will experience visually the increasingly dire consequences of how we have been treating the Earth – how Planet Earth, big as it is, is affected by human pollution and abuse and exploitation.

Many would say global warming and our response to it is one of the greatest moral issues facing us at the beginning of the 21st century. The world's science community is agreed that human-caused climate changes now imperil Earth. The most recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change states that we have a very short window of about 15 years to prevent climate change on Planet Earth from becoming irreversible. Such irreversible climate change could well lead to a destruction of creation that we do not wish even to contemplate.

On the other hand, God's intention for the whole of His creation has always been for good -- for beauty, for our responsible use and for our blessing. From Genesis through Revelation, God's deep desire for all of creation,

including humankind, is always blessing. God desires nothing short of a restored creation, which includes a peaceable ecosystem. This is one part of the “new thing” God wants to do among us.

When we read Chapter 1 of Genesis, we hear these words: “God saw that the light was **good** . . . God saw that the Earth and the seas, these were **good** . . . God saw that the vegetation, the plants and the trees, these were **good** . . . God saw that the lights in the sky, these were **good** . . . God saw that the living creatures in the seas, the great sea monsters, the birds in the air, every living creature, all the creeping things, every kind of cattle, all the wild things, these were **good** . . . God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, [God concludes] it was **very good**.” So we begin in the first chapter of the first book of the Bible to understand God’s marvellous intent for His creation.



But that's not all. In fact, when God created us human beings, He gave us a specific assignment in His creation. Genesis tells us we are made in God's image – not physically of course, but in the sense of having consciousness and possessing a moral nature and a will that enable us to choose how we might act toward each other and toward the Earth. And to human beings, male and female, having been made in God's image, God assigns an amazing stewardship role and a duty of diligence toward His created order. In essence, God has made us responsible for the care of His creation on Earth. God sets out this role for us initially in Genesis 1, verses 26 and 28. God has just finished creating everything else in nature and now He comes to human beings:

In verse 28 there is more: “God blessed them [male and female], and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’”



Michelangelo: The Creation of Adam 1510  
Cappella Sistina, Vatican

One key word here is "**dominion.**" Too often it is taken to justify unchecked authority or control or dominance over others, exploiting perceived weaker beings and creatures. But was this the meaning intended by God? The answer is a resounding no. Every commentator with whom I checked, whether in a theological book by those who understand the meaning of the original Hebrew or in a question to someone (and each of us is a living commentator) -- all agreed that dominion does not mean exploitation or supreme authority but, rather, caring stewardship with great privileges and great responsibilities. The biblical doctrine of creation has always been that human beings have an effect for good or for ill on creation. We serve as God's representatives on Earth, with the responsible task of caring wisely and lovingly for His creation.

Another key word is "**subdue.**" While the word may sound harsh and controlling, its meaning or intention is

dramatically different. “Subdue” does not imply a wild and unruly condition for creation because God Himself pronounced His creation “good” – in the beginning. Rather, the word speaks of a productive ordering of the Earth and its inhabitants so it will yield its riches and accomplish God’s purposes. Caring stewardship will so work with creation that if we treat the Earth wisely, responsibly and carefully, we will discover that the Earth’s rich natural resources will yield its fruit generously and provide us with the support and living we need.

As Christians we see God’s caring intention for creation and for His people not only in Genesis but, ultimately, in Jesus Christ -- in His very person and in His teachings. We usually speak of God as the Creator. But listen to these Scripture passages. First, from the Gospel of John, Chapter 1, verses 1 through 4:

In the beginning the Word already existed; the Word was with God, and the Word was God. From the very beginning the Word was with God. Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him. The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to humanity.

Then from Paul’s Letter to the Colossians, Chapter 1, verse 16:

For through Him God created everything in heaven and on earth, the seen and the unseen things .... God created the whole universe through him and for him.

Sagittarius Star Cloud



Hubble  
Heritage

NASA, ESA, and The Hubble Heritage Team (STScI/AURA) • Hubble Space Telescope ACS • STScI-PRC98-30

And from the Letter to the Hebrews, Chapter 1, verse 2:  
In these last days he has spoken to us through his  
Son. He is the one through whom God created the  
universe . . . .

This Word that John spoke about, this Son that the  
writer of Hebrews spoke about is one and the same. And  
the Word -- the Son -- is also the Good Shepherd whom we  
follow -- in His life, death and resurrection. The One we  
know as Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, is also the One

through whom all creation came into existence. He who loves all of humanity also loves all of His creation. He who gave His life for the sin and sorrow and suffering of all humanity understands more than we can ever know about the frustration and groaning of an injured and damaged creation – His loved creation – awaiting its redemption.

In Romans 8, we catch the strong flavour of the intimate connection between humankind and the rest of creation. It is so intimate that our spiritual restoration, our redemption in Jesus Christ, has a major effect on creation. “Creation is on tiptoe” is the way one Bible translator expresses it. Isn’t that a striking image? An impersonal creation is pictured as having a personal sense of deep longing and earnest expectation waiting for the children of God to come into full redemption and renewal in Jesus Christ. That fullness will occur in the final day when Jesus returns again. And that is the eager hope for all creation, not just for people redeemed in Christ.

Christ’s good intention toward his creation can also be seen in the first and greatest commandment – the commandment underlying all commandments:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
and with all your soul, and with all your mind.  
(Matthew 22:37).

God is love. And God’s creation on Earth is an expression of God’s love. Can there be any doubt that loving God wholeheartedly includes loving His creation by respecting it, caring for it and protecting it rather than destroying it? We can’t honour the God of creation if we dishonour God’s creation. We must accept God’s creation

as a gift, guard it as a precious treasure and care for it to the glory of God.

In his book *The Magician's Nephew*, part of *The Chronicles of Narnia* series, C. S. Lewis wrote of the creation of Narnia – including beasts that talked -- through the song of Aslan (the lion who represents Jesus in the book). The Creation Song is clearly intended to reveal the majesty and glory of Aslan. As in Genesis 1, it is a grand call to worship. But there is one character in the story, Uncle Andrew, who refused to hear Creation's Song. And the consequences were staggering. Lewis wrote:

“When the great moment came and the Beasts spoke, [Uncle Andrew] missed the whole point, for a rather interesting reason. When the Lion had first begun singing, long ago when it was still quite dark, he had realized that the noise was a song. And [Uncle Andrew] had disliked the song very much. It made him think and feel things he did not want to think and feel. Then, when the sun rose and he saw that the singer was a Lion ('only a lion,' as he said to himself) he tried his hardest to make himself believe that it wasn't singing and never had been singing -- only roaring as any lion might in a zoo in our own world. 'Of course it can't really have been singing,' he thought, 'I must have imagined it. I've been letting my nerves get out of order. Who ever heard of a lion singing?' And the longer and more beautifully the Lion sang, the harder Uncle Andrew tried to make himself believe that he could hear nothing but roaring. Now the trouble about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are [as Lewis wrote] is that you very often succeed. Uncle Andrew did. He soon did hear nothing but roaring in Aslan's song. Soon he couldn't have heard anything else even if he had wanted to. And when at

last the Lion spoke and said, ‘Narnia awake,’ he didn’t hear any words: he heard only a snarl. And when the Beasts spoke in answer, he heard only barkings, growlings, bayings, and howlings.”

What do you see when you look at the Earth – at the whole of creation? Something that is big enough to take our abuse, our exploitation and our pollution? Or is Earth and everything on it something God has given us as a gift to be tended carefully, wisely and responsibly?

**Let us be good stewards who tend this Planet Earth with love. It is the Good Shepherd’s way. Amen.**

Rev. Chris Miller  
May 6, 2007



Source: NASA - Earthrise From Apollo 11.